

THE

SCRIPTURAL DEACON;

AN INQUIRY INTO THE

DISTINCT RIGHTS

OF THE

OFFICERS AND PEOPLE,

IN THE

MANAGEMENT

OF THE

TEMPORAL CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH.

BY

A COMMITTEE MAN.

“Thou art permitted to speak for thyself.”—ACTS xxvi. 1.

“Honor to whom honor is due.”—ROMANS xiii. 7.

“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage.”—1 PET. v. 3.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

READER,—

It is taken for granted, that whatever may have been your opinions on “the deacon question,” they have been your honest convictions of truth. If so, you will neither refuse to read this Essay yourself, nor use your influence to keep it out of the hands of others; but, on the contrary, it will be your desire that all who are interested in this subject may give a candid and impartial hearing to both sides.

N. B. It will be taken as a special favor, if our brethren, into whose hands this may fall, in the several congregations throughout the Church, will furnish us with the address of persons to whom it may be sent for sale, and the probable number of copies that may be wanted.

215 $\frac{1}{2}$ Division-street, New-York.

INTRODUCTION.

THE object of this Essay, is a defence of the principle, that congregations, in their congregational capacity, have a right to the management and control of what is understood by their *temporal concerns*; in opposition to the new, (or rather the old exploded principle now sought to be revived,) that all this is official business, belonging to the Ministers, Elders, and Deacons, united in consistory.

We say this claim for official power is *new* among Covenanters. They have never, as a church, assumed this power either in Scotland, Ireland, or America, nor has any individual ever publicly put forth this claim in any of the two former, and, although in the latter, the officers have managed the temporalities in a few congregations for about twenty-five years past, yet it seems it was not claimed by them as of Divine right, but only preferred to other modes. In proof of this, let it be observed, that Dr. McLeod, (who may be considered the leader in this business,) in the particular act of incorporation which he obtained for the Reformed Presbyterian Church in New-York, limits the power of the officers as follows—"Provided that they shall not at any time determine or alter the minister's salary, or the annual rent of pews, but that the same shall

be always subject to the *vote* of the congregation, any thing in this act, or the act to which this is supplementary, to the contrary notwithstanding." Now it is perfectly plain from the above, that the distinguished divine, above alluded to, did not believe that all the temporalities of the Church are, by divine right, to be managed and controlled by the officers ; for the right is here reserved to the people, to dictate to them both in the amount of the collections and expenditures. And indeed the idea, that by Divine authority, the Deacons are to manage all the temporalities of the Church, and yet to make them dependant upon the dictation of the congregation, both as to what money they shall collect, and what they shall do with it, is an absurdity too glaring to be entertained by any man of common sense, who knows any thing of church order. It is an essential principle in the order of God's house, that all official authority is derived from the Church's Head, and is to be exercised in his name ; and that all opposition to such authority, or its lawful exercise, is resisting the ordinance of God. We risk nothing in saying, that whatever is official business may not be meddled with by the people, either by controlling the officers, or assuming it to themselves. And on the other hand, whatever is not official business cannot be usurped by the officers, without unjustly infringing upon the prerogatives of the people.

But all the congregations in the State of New-York, incorporated under this act, hold the principle contained in the provision quoted above, which is, that consistories must be governed and controlled by the congregations, both in their receipts and expenditures ; consequently it is not claimed by them, that

their officers have the whole management of the finances, by divine right.

The fact is, that this claim was first set up in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, in the year 1841, by the Rev. J. M. Willson, in a publication entitled, "The Deacon,"* in which, he very properly assumes the title of "Pioneer," and requests the reader "not to reject at once propositions that may be *new* to him. Weigh the evidence."

With this advice, we have endeavored to comply, and, in weighing it in "the balance of the sanctuary," we have found it wanting; and we are induced by a sense of duty, and the pressing solicitations of a few friends, with whom we have conversed, to hold up the balance to the inspection of our brethren, not because we can suppose ourselves capable of instructing the church, but only to awaken the attention of the members to the subject, in order that all may examine for themselves, the ground upon which this new claim rests, and we would say unto all, "why halt ye between two opinions?" If this claim be well founded, it is our duty to submit at once, and if not, it is as clearly our duty to *resist* the *innovation*.

To ascertain the extent of the claim here put forth, the reader is referred to "The *Deacon*," in p. 75, when speaking on "the question respecting the title to church property," the Rev. Author says: "At present, there can be very satisfactory reasons given why the title should be vested in the officers of the congregation." And respecting the *revenues* of the congregation, he says, page 68, "There can

* In our frequent references to this publication and its Rev. Author, in order to avoid any thing that might have the appearance of personal disrespect, which we entirely disclaim, we will uniformly use the term "The *Deacon*."

be no reason why they should not *all* be managed under the general supervision and *control* of the eldership ;” and also in page 69, in reference to the operation of his *new* system, he says, that “serious injustice or mal-administration may be *rectified* at the stated presbyterial visitation, or even be carried up through the courts, according to their regular gradation.”

Here the claim is put forth, 1st. That the title to the church property should be vested in the “*officers*,” not the deacons *alone*, as some suppose. 2d. That the *revenues* of the congregation should *all* be *controlled* by the “*eldership*.” And 3d. That all the higher courts in the Church are to *rectify* acts of mal-administration in this business, “according to their regular gradation.” Now, is it not a fundamental principle of Presbyterianism, that in all matters in which church courts have appellate, they have also original jurisdiction. If this be the case, then, this *new* system, if permitted to operate, would take out of the hands of every congregation in the church, all ownership of property, and place it in the church courts. Are Covenanters prepared for this? We think not.

But why, it may be asked, has this question been “agitated” at all? Is it because the first movers in this business are wiser or more faithful than our covenanted forefathers? This will hardly be claimed. What, then, gave rise to the present state of things on this subject? We cannot tell, but must refer the inquirer to those with whom it originated. It seems to be worthy of observation, however, that we have here a striking illustration of the trite remark, that “the Church is always deeply affected by the exam-

ple of the community by which she is surrounded." Thus, a few years ago, when insubordination in the state threatened to involve the whole country in anarchy and confusion, a remarkable degree of the *same* spirit showed itself in the Church; and when this had subsided, and order been, in some measure, restored, the whole community was thrown into a feverish excitement on the question, "who shall take care of and *control the public purse?*" and it is a remarkable fact, that just about that time, *this new claim* for official power over all the temporalities of the church was first put forth, and from that time to the present, the excitement in the church has kept pace with that in the state, upon this very similar question.

It has been frequently asked, why have not some of the ministers replied to "*The Deacon?*" and it is at length boasted, both in public and in private, that the arguments of that publication are "unanswerable."* Now, we do not pretend to know why it has not been answered, but we hope to make it appear, that it is not because it is unanswerable; perhaps they have thought, that as Covenanters have so often showed themselves to be proof against *new* principles and practices, that a "*Pioneer*" on any subject would have very little success among them. But it ought to be remembered, that we have here a *pioneer*, claiming to be walking in the "footsteps of the flock;" a very strange position, indeed, for that functionary, but a necessary one to assume, in order to gain much credence among Covenanters.

Perhaps an apology from us is expected, for pre-

* See the Report of the Rev. William Sloane's Speech, as published in the *Covenanter*, page 23.

suming to enter the list of controversy with so distinguished a champion. We do not see, however, that any is required. Were it a trial of *personal* skill or prowess, the contest would indeed be a very unequal one, and we would justly deserve to be chastised for our temerity; but as it is simply a question of *principle*, upon which we have as good a right to think and write as any body else—and as *truth*, in the hand of a *child* in intellect, is more than a match for *error*, in the hand of a *giant*—we therefore submit our thoughts to the public in our own way, with this request, that the reader will only look at what *is said*, keeping entirely out of view the person who said it, for it is the “*Truth* that is mighty, and shall prevail.” And we confess here, that the only apology we feel disposed to make, is because this humble effort in behalf of truth and order did not appear sooner.

And as to its literary execution, we have very little to say. We make no pretensions to learning, and, therefore, elegance of composition, nor even correct grammatical construction in all cases will not be expected by the reader; and on this point we feel very little solicitude, for errors of this kind will, perhaps, not be so glaring as to be noticed by those whose education has been limited, like our own; and no candid critic, who has had superior advantages, will attempt to make any thing out of that circumstance. If we shall only succeed in making our arguments understood, and if these shall have the effect of awakening, in any degree, the members of the Church generally, to a more serious and close examination of this subject, it is all that we can expect to accomplish.

NEW-YORK, 1845.

THE SCRIPTURAL DEACON.

CHAPTER I.

The question stated, and preliminaries arranged for its discussion.

IN order to discuss this subject with perspicuity, and keep the mind directed to the true issue, two things are of the highest importance—1st. To state the question fairly—and 2d. To draw the proofs from standards acknowledged by, and binding upon, all concerned. This we propose to do in the following pages—and 1st. The question stated: In the first place, we are compelled to state, in opposition to the misapprehension or misrepresentation of "*The Deacon*," that the question is not "Christ's institution or man's,"* "Christ's appointment or man's invention,"† nor any thing respecting "Substitutes for the Deacons;"‡ for all this takes it for granted, that, by divine institution, the deacons are to manage *all* the temporalities of the church, which is the very point at issue. This is what is technically called "begging the question."

* *The Deacon*, page 42.

† *Ib.* 43.

‡ Page 40.

In the second place. The question is not whether the common temporalities of the church shall be managed by *ordained* or *unordained officers*; there is no such thing in the Church as *unordained officers*, and those who oppose "The *Deacon's*" system, do not claim that trustees or committee-men are church officers, and he knows that very well; for he says, "that the radical principle of the trustee system is, that trustees and committees, who perform similar duties, are no church officers, but the mere agents of the people."* And yet he argues against trustees and committee-men, as *officers*, although it is the radical principle of the trustee system that they are not, "The *Deacon*" himself being judge. The truth is, that when congregations appoint a few of their number to act for them in this matter, they do it upon the same principle precisely that synods and presbyteries transact business by committees; which is, that the acts of these committees when according to their instructions, are the acts of the congregation, just as the acts of the committees of synods and presbyteries are the acts of these bodies.

This principle is clearly exhibited in 1 Cor. 16 chap. 3d and 4th verses—"And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem, and if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me." Here we see that this act of the Church at Corinth, was to be completed by a committee or commissioners, at the suggestion of the apostle Paul. The same principle is also exhibited in 2nd Cor. 8 chap.

19th verse. In commenting on these passages, "*The Deacon*" says—

"The only attempt ever made, perhaps, to gather the office of trustee from the Scriptures, has been from 1 Cor. 16 chap. 3 verse, and 2 Cor. 8 chap. 19 verse, and, it may be, one or two other passages of the same tenor. Besides the difficulty there will forever be, in establishing, from these passages, the right to commission any but a Deacon to convey the Church's contributions to Jerusalem, there are two others which are insuperable.—1st. It is absurd to say, that the mere carrying of funds, constitutes an office; and 2nd, which is still more fatal, if these texts prove any thing on the subject at all, they prove too much, even for the advocate of the system which we oppose, viz.—That the people have a right to appoint trustees for the poor's fund, and thus banish Deacons altogether; for the money conveyed was that sent to the saints at Jerusalem."*

Now respecting this everlasting difficulty in establishing the right to commission any but a Deacon to convey the Church's contribution to Jerusalem, we remark, that the very fact of these messengers *requiring* a commission, proves that this was not official business at all, for all the church officers have full power and authority to perform all their official duties, and cannot be dependant upon any *new* appointment or commission for the performance of any part of them; and hence, it is plain, that these commissioners were selected from among the people, to perform that piece of service for the Corinthian Church, as their representatives, not as officers, but as a committee, or trustees. And, with regard to the other two insuperable objections, "*The Deacon*" himself has furnished answers for both of them. In reply to the first, we remark, that we perfectly agree with him "that it *is* absurd to say, that the mere carrying of funds constitutes an office;" but, as he has correctly stated, that "the radical

principle of the trustee system is, that trustees and committees, who perform similar duties, are no church officers," therefore, this absurdity is not chargeable to that system at all; and as the idea, that trustees and committee-men are viewed as church officers, is only a creation of his own fancy; the absurdity of *so viewing* them must be traceable to the same source. And thus we see that the above objection, instead of being "insuperable," has no application to the subject at all. The second objection is said to be still more fatal, (and if it be not, it is very harmless,) which is—"If these texts prove any thing on the subject at all, they prove too much even for the advocate of the system which we oppose, viz: That the people have a right to appoint trustees for the poor's fund, and thus banish the Deacons altogether: for the money conveyed was that sent to the saints at Jerusalem." Now to ward off the "*fatal*" effects of this objection, all that is necessary is, to place in juxtaposition with it, "The Deacon's" own statement respecting the design of this very money. In page 46, he says—"Moreover these collections, when sent to Jerusalem, would there be improved in the best manner, undoubtedly for promoting the good of the Church. They were *not* designed *solely* to *feed the poor*. They were sent to strengthen a feeble church, as in our times is often done; so the church has always explained this matter." And this is, no doubt, the true explanation, for it is not said that these collections were for the *poor*, but for "the *saints*" as a body.

In the third place. The question is not as "The *Deacon*" has stated, whether—

"The funds invested in the place of worship, and those which go to

the maintenance of the ministry, and other charges attendant upon the enjoyment and propagation of the gospel, are a mere *joint-stock concern*, and differing from the property invested in a bank or a road only in the circumstance, that the revenue anticipated in the one case consists in dollars, in the other in religious and moral improvement. That there is no dedication of property in the one case more than in the other.”

And he further says, that—

“It is difficult, indeed, to believe that any devout mind can contemplate, without revolting at it, this doctrine as thus stated in its naked deformity. Yet it is certainly the fact, that this statement embraces the essential principle of the trustee system.”*

Now, were this only a reference to an abuse of the system of congregations managing their temporalities by committees or trustees, it would not be worthy of notice; but as it is asserted, that it “is certainly the fact, that this statement embraces the essential principle of the trustee system,” it is consequently intended to apply to every congregation, without any exception, where the finances have been managed by trustees or committee-men; for no system can exist without its *essential* principle. It therefore becomes absolutely necessary that some notice should be taken of it. We will, however, take no more notice of it than it deserves, which is to indignantly pronounce it a *slander* upon every congregation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, the finances of which have been managed in this way, in all the past ages of her history. Ay, and we will hold him to it, until he produces *one* single instance where and when the principle has either been taught or practised upon, that church property can “be sold and distributed for the individual benefit of the members of the church, or the pew-holders;” or

“the revenues appropriated to the private uses of the members of the congregation ;” “ Or, in case of removal, that any contributor might demand an assessment and receive his share.” And when “on the other hand, immigrants have attached themselves to the church, or individuals made a profession of religion in a particular church ;” and it has been denied that “they become entitled to the benefits of the church property ;” and moreover, when and where it has been denied, “that the poor have a real and true joint-interest in the ecclesiastical goods, as well as the rich.” These particulars are all taken from “*The Deacon*,” page 48, because they are given as distinctive of his system, in opposition to that which he describes as “the essential principle of the trustee system.” And we repeat it, that if he cannot show where and when a congregation of Covenanters has offended in *all* or *any* of the above particulars, he must stand convicted of publishing a *slander* upon his brethren. And it is difficult indeed to believe, that any devout mind can contemplate, without revolting at it, this statement, thus exhibited in its naked deformity, unless he be entirely ignorant of the practice of the church in this matter, or has entirely forgotten that the ninth commandment has yet a place in the decalogue.

In the fourth place, we have no dispute with “*The Deacon*” about the perpetuity of this office. We believe that it is perpetual and may be recalled at any time when the *circumstances* of the Church require it. But as he has given his views, in which he shows not only that a church *may* exist with “nothing in her circumstances to recall this office,” but actually points us to a church that *did* so exist for

many years. And as that was no less than the Reformed Presbyterian Church; and moreover as this is contained in the Appendix to his pamphlet, it must be viewed as his “Sober Second Thought.” We, therefore, give the passage entire, as preferable to any thing that we could advance upon this point.

“As to the Covenanters, who dissented from the Revolution Settlement, it is not difficult to ascertain why this office should have disappeared from among them also.

“While the persecution raged, it was impossible to preserve their perfect organization. Whether the deacons which James Renwick, in a letter to Sir Robert Hamilton, says “he was about to ordain,” were ever actually ordained or not, is uncertain. His speedy martyrdom probably prevented it. After the year 1688, their societies were left eighteen years without a minister. Of course no ordinations took place during that period among them, either of Elders or Deacons.* They were literally like sheep without a shepherd. This was their state for many years after the constitution of a presbytery. They could scarcely be said to have *congregations*; they were rather *missionary stations* dispersed here and there. A full and regular organization could hardly be looked for. Moreover, it ought to be remembered that, before the period when their congregations had become compacted, the churches around them had dropped the deacon’s office. There was, consequently, *nothing in their circumstances to recall this office*. Other plans had gradually grown up for the accomplishment of the objects contemplated in its institution. It is a ground of rejoicing that the Scottish churches are awakening to the consideration of this subject.

“The observations just made, apply with equal truth to the same denomination in Ireland. It is not more than one generation since most of the congregations of the Reformed Presbyterian Church *there*, have passed from the condition of missionary stations. While a church exists in so scattered a state, the want of deacons is not sensibly felt, and passes unobserved.”†

Now to this we have only to add, that, “the observations just made apply, with equal truth, to the

* Query. If they had Deacons previous to that time, what became of them all? Did the persecution drive them all away? We read in the *Informatory Vindication*, page 302, (New-York edition,) that Mr. Thomas Linning, in the year 1688, “returned to Scotland an ordained minister, and was by the number of *twenty-four Elders*, together with the suffrage of the *whole* remnant of Scotland, called and embraced as their actual minister. But there is not a word of a *Deacon*.

† Page 73.

same denomination" in the United States of America. For "the most of the congregations of the Reformed Presbyterian" Church *here* have not *yet* passed from the *condition* of "*missionary* stations." There is "consequently nothing in *their circumstances* to recall this office." Nor never will be according to the above reasoning, until they have large congregations and the churches around them have deacons. The former of these is the true reason why the Covenanters have not had deacons. And it is agreeable to Scripture, for it was the *circumstance* of the number of the disciples being *multiplied* that was the "*occasion*" of their appointment at the first. And it is also agreeable to our form of church government, for it is there said that the number of each of the officers "is to be proportioned according to the *condition* of the congregation."* But the latter we must *reject*, for it implies that our covenanted forefathers were guided in this matter by the example of the corrupt churches around them, while the fact is, that they were then bearing an active and faithful testimony against "the corruptions of both Church and State."

In the fifth place. The question is not whether the Deacons have power *about* the temporalities of the Church. The affirmative of this is admitted, (for the supplies for the poor are temporalities,) but how much power have they? Or, when simply stated, the question for discussion seems to be this—*Has the Head of the Church committed the management of all her temporal concerns to the officers, or left a part of them to be managed by the body of the faithful?*

* Confession of Faith, page 574.

2d. The standards to which we shall appeal for proof.

And here again we must take a different course from "The *Deacon*;" and

In the first place, No part of our argument will be drawn from abuses, that might be found in consistories or boards of Deacons. Although we are not at a loss for materials for that kind of argument; for example, we could point to a consistory, (and perhaps the very first one formed in the Reformed Presbyterian Church,) that took away the property of the congregation, in spite of a large majority of its members, and sold it for a temple of popish idolatry. But we do not use this as an argument at all; for, however it might answer the purpose of "agitation," (which is not our object,) it can never contribute, in any degree, to the establishing of a sound principle; and if this kind of argument be at all admissible, then all the ordinances of divine appointment among men might be argued against, for they have all been abused. Nor have we one word of apology to make for any *abuses* that may be found in the trustee system. We give *them* all over to "The *Deacon*" for immediate execution.

In the second place, We shall make no appeal to the opinions of men on this question, because it has never been discussed to any extent in its present aspect.

The question respecting the Deacon's office, for which the Church "contended so long and suffered so much" since the Reformation, was, whether she should manage her own temporalities, or submit to the usurped authority of certain Erastian civil rulers in this matter. And, therefore, opinions expressed

in these discussions, cannot, with any fairness, be used here. Besides, these opinions, being given in answer to a very different question, their authors might have given very different opinions upon the point now before us. Neither will we wait to examine the testimony brought forward by "*The Deacon*" from this source. For no sensible man needs to be told, that we might admit, (which we by no means do,) that all the great and good men referred to, did entertain the opinions which he attributes to them; but this being only human testimony, the question would remain to be argued as much as before.

The quotations from the fathers also being of the same kind of testimony precisely, are liable to the very same objections. And the fact that they lived near the times of the Apostles, is no proof that they were always right; for the Apostles themselves sometimes misapprehended the words of their divine master, while he was yet with them in the flesh. John, 21 chap. 23 verse: "Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus said not unto him, he shall not die." And moreover, we know that the "mystery of iniquity did already work,"* in the days of the Apostle Paul, and there is no doubt but that among the very first *workings* of that tyrannical system, was a grasping for power over *temporal* things. And it would not be at all wonderful, if even some good men were affected by this desire, so congenial to human nature in its present state. The wonder is, that "*The Deacon*" has been able to produce so *little* from this

* 2 Thess. 2 chap. 7 verse.

source. For these reasons, then, we will not follow his example, in appealing for proof to the *fathers*, but very greatly prefer the example of a godly old woman, when a *popish priest* was pressing upon her attention the dogmas of popery, by quotations from "the fathers." "Tell me no more," said she, "about the *fathers*, for that principle is not worth having that is not derived from the GRANDFATHERS, who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

In the third place, As "the Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and on whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit, speaking in the Scriptures."† Therefore, all our proofs shall be drawn from this infallible and "only rule of faith and manners." and the subordinate standards of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, "founded upon and agreeable thereto."

* Confession of Faith, page 32.

CHAPTER II.

“The Deacon’s” claim to the management and control of all the temporalities of the Church, is not founded in Scripture.

IT is incumbent upon those who claim official power in the Church, to exhibit their *warrant* for such authority, from “the word of God, the only rule of faith and manners,” either by precept or divinely approved example. Failing to do this, they have no right to expect that their claims will be either respected or submitted to by an enlightened people. In view of all this, “The *Deacon*” has indeed brought his views to the Scripture; but it seems, it was only to have them *confirmed*, for he says:—“The Scriptures and the footsteps of the flock, both with equal explicitness confirm our views of this subject.”* He then proceeds to quote Scripture to show that “the daily ministration was the management, for public purposes, of a common stock, created by the contributions of the disciples; that from this stock all the ecclesiastical expenses were defrayed, and likewise the poor, if there were any, supported.”† Now, all this is readily admitted; but when he comes to speak of who *managed* this fund, instead of analyzing the inspired record, and exhibiting the facts therein contained for the instruction of the Church, he (“pioneer” like) breaks forth, as if impatient of such restraints, and lays the foundation of his new system in the following string of unsupported assertions:

“ The business, over which the deacons were appointed, was the *whole* of this daily ministration—the *whole* service of the tables. The apostles themselves say, referring to the *whole* of that charge, which they had at first undertaken, and for a time managed, that the deacons were appointed over *this* business. It is plain, therefore, that the entire fund formed by contributions for ecclesiastical purposes, was at first managed by the apostles, and by them transferred to the *deacons*. There could have been at that time no other officer—such as a trustee or committee-man appointed to any part of this charge. The *whole* was first placed in the apostles’ hands. The *whole* was placed in the hands of the deacons when they were ordained. These are the views which have been entertained of this passage by the purest churches, and by the greater part of judicious commentators.”*

Now, we do not deny to these assertions all the mutual support that may be derived from the circumstance of so many of the same kind being so closely crowded together, and the additional fact, that some other very worthy men may have entertained similar views. But we do most positively deny, that they are supported in any degree by any thing contained in the inspired record, from which they profess to have been taken. We are, then, directly at issue with “ The *Deacon* ” on every one of the above assertions, or rather the one assertion, so often repeated in substance, “ that the entire fund, formed by contributions for ecclesiastical purposes, was at first managed by the Apostles, and by them transferred to the Deacons.” And if we were to assert the direct opposite of all this—that the apostles never assumed the management of this fund, and never transferred it to the deacons, and repeat the former five times and the latter three times in the space of thirteen lines, referring the reader to Acts, chaps. 2d and 4th, for proof, without even condescending to point out the verses of these chapters where such

interesting information is to be found—and then wind up the paragraph by asserting that the “purest churches and the greater part of judicious commentators” have entertained the same views, and then proceed to quote men’s opinions and the passages in the subordinate standards of various churches that might by any possibility be construed to suit our purpose, it would just be what “*The Deacon*” has done, and no more. And all this would be no very difficult task, for it is one of the easiest things in the world to make *assertions* ; the difficulty is all in *proving* them. Nor would it be very difficult to show that a very great majority have not held “*The Deacon’s*” views, of those whose claims for very high esteem and affectionate regard are felt and acknowledged by every true Presbyterian, and whose memory is especially embalmed in the hearts of Covenanters. Among these are to be found the *Westminster divines*, the ministers of the Church of Scotland, and all orthodox Presbyterian Dissenters in Scotland and Ireland for the last 200 years ; and though last, not least, our *Covenanted Forefathers*, and all Covenanters, down to the present time—who, with a very few *modern* exceptions, have all taught and *practised* upon the principle, that the deacon’s power does not extend to all the temporalities of the church. And as to the doctrine and practice of “the purest churches” on this subject, we suppose it will depend very much upon the estimate that different persons may form of their comparative purity. It is very certain, however, that the *Reformed Presbyterian Church* has always recognized the right of the people, in their congregational capacity to manage their temporal affairs, without

the interference of deacons, or any other officer. This will not be denied by "The *Deacon*," for he has admitted it in his pamphlet,* that the office of the deacon disappeared from among the Covenanters more than one hundred and sixty years ago : and he knows that only a few months before the publication of his Essay, the very synod of which he is a member declared that "the exercise of the deacon's office does not extend to all the temporalities of the Church," and was honored with his dissent on that occasion.

Now we do think, that with all this before his eyes, when making his sweeping assertion, that the "*purest churches*" entertained his views, honor and candor *required* that he should have *excepted* the Reformed Presbyterian Church. And it would certainly be no great stretch of liberality, nor no very gross violation of modesty, to claim that she should be acknowledged, both by her *ministers* and people, as having a place at least *among* the purest churches. It is honest, however, to give her no more credit for purity than she is considered to be entitled to.

With such ample materials for the prosecution of the discussion, after "The *Deacon's*" fashion as would be furnished by the "cloud of witnesses" above alluded to, quite a display of argument might be made by a person skilled in that art ; but as the writer of this Essay acknowledges himself to be a mere novice in such matters, and as the exhibition of truth, and not display, is his object, and as such arguments at best cannot be conclusive ; for men may err in their opinions, and churches in their decisions ; therefore, the opinions of the great and good men above

alluded to, are only pointed to as a protection against "agitation," conducted, as it is, under such high pretensions of attachment to the "footsteps of the flock."

We have already ascertained, that the only point of dispute between "The *Deacon*" and ourselves is, whether or not the Deacon's power extends to all the temporalities of the Church; or, to narrow it down still further, it is, whether or not his assertion be *true* that "the *entire fund* formed by contributions for ecclesiastical purposes, was at first managed by the Apostles, and by them transferred to the Deacons."* For this alleged fact is the very foundation of his system; and we freely admit, that if it be true, it is a scriptural one; but if, on the contrary, we can demonstrate that this assertion is *not true*, then his foundation will be removed, and, as a natural consequence, all that has been built upon it, will fall to the ground.

We have also found that "the Supreme Judge by which this controversy is to be determined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures."

What then are we taught in the sacred record of these transactions? We take the position that the apostles did *not manage* that *fund*, nor *assume* any *control* over it, and consequently did not *transfer* it to the *deacons*, but left it by the will of the Church's Head to be managed by the *body of the faithful* in their social congregated capacity. And in support of this position, we submit the following arguments drawn from the inspired history of the case.

First. *It is impossible*, from the very nature of the *Apostles' duties*, that they *could* have managed this fund.

For it is said of them, that "daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ."* And they themselves say, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word."†

Now, although "The *Deacon*" may have succeeded in his labored argument, in showing that the Apostles "did not here mean exclusive attention" to the Word; it still remains very plain, however, that the spiritual wants of about twelve thousand people, together with their own private devotions, did require and *receive* so much of their attention as rendered it impossible for them to attend to the ministering to the temporal wants also of so great a multitude.

Some may attempt to avoid the force of this argument by saying, that they were assisted by some of the people; but this cannot be admitted for a moment, for the Apostles could not employ any of the people in the performance of any of their *official* duties, for no official business can be performed by *proxy* in the Church. Consequently, if it was official business at all, they must have performed it all in their "own proper persons," which is impossible.

Second. The Apostles, in their direction‡ to the multitude, "to look out among them seven men whom they might appoint" over, the *need* that then appeared very clearly intimate that they had not yet entered upon any business of that kind.

* Acts, 5 chap. 42 verse. † Acts, 6 chap. 4 verse. ‡ Acts, 6 chap. 2, 3 verse.

For, they say, "it is not reason that we *should leave* the word of God and serve tables." They do not give a single hint that they had, in their *past* experience, or that they *then* found money matters to be burdensome to them. They speak of it only in the *future*. "It is not reason that we *should*," &c., &c. It is plain, therefore, that they had not *yet* left the word of God to serve tables, or as "The *Deacon*" would have it, "to devote themselves to pecuniary affairs."*

Third. In the whole history of these transactions, there is not a single act of the Apostles recorded, respecting the management of this fund, either as to its collection or distribution. If there is, let "The *Deacon*," or any body else, produce it. The entire silence of the Scriptures, as to their management of it, is enough to set that opinion aside.

Fourth. There is *positive* and conclusive testimony, that this fund was managed by the *people* themselves, and that with the *approbation* of the Apostles. And here we would respectfully invite the reader's careful attention, and request that he would subject this argument to the most *severe* scrutiny; for this is the key-stone of the arch—"We speak as unto wise men, judge ye what we say."

The first account we have of this fund and its management is contained in Acts, 2 chap. 44 and 45 verses—"And all that believed were together and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men as every man had need."

This is one of the portions relied on on by "The

Deacon" for the confirmation of his views—now the simple question to be decided here is, whether did the Apostles or the people manage this fund? But simple though this question be, it is at this moment full of deep interest to every member of the Church, and pregnant with momentous consequences. The soundness of the *new* system of managing the Church's temporalities is to be tested by it. The reputation for integrity, of our covenanted forefathers is by it to be impeached or defended; and by this very question the *peace* and *prosperity* (and perhaps the *unity*) of the Church are to be deeply affected. Who then shall answer it? Shall the bold assertions of "The *Deacon*" be taken as the answer, or shall the pen of Inspiration be allowed to furnish it.

If "The *Deacon's*" assertions are to be taken, he says "that it was at first undertaken, and for a time managed by the Apostles, and again, that the whole was first placed in the Apostles' hands."* But when we turn to the Scripture itself, we not only search in vain for the information that this fund was either placed in their hands or undertaken by them, but we find, that in this whole passage, there is not the most remote *allusion* to the Apostles, either directly or indirectly; and after the formation of this fund, we find the Apostle Peter declaring, "Silver and gold have I none;"† Again. If his assertion is to be taken, he says, "The entire fund was at first managed by the Apostles."‡ But the Holy Spirit, speaking in the Scriptures, says, "That all that believed sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men as every man had need." Now we appeal to

* Page 24.

† Acts, 3 chap. 6 verse.

‡ Page 24.

every candid and sensible person, to every one capable of the least reflection, and to the most profound thinker, to decide, whether or not there is in this scripture record the most positive and conclusive testimony that this fund was *not* managed by the Apostles, but by the *body of the faithful*. Here then, we see that the King and Head of the Church, in his infinite goodness and wisdom, has given to her a pattern* for conducting her temporal affairs in her New-Testament form, and from this pattern we learn—

1st. That the members of the Church are to unite their efforts for the promotion of her temporal welfare—"for all that believed were together."

2d. That it is right to form in a congregation, by general contribution, a fund for the support of the Gospel, in which all the members shall have a common interest—for all that believed had all things common."

3d. That it is a duty to contribute liberally to such a fund, for in order to do so "all that believed sold their possessions and goods."

4th. We learn from this pattern, which was dictated by unerring wisdom, that this fund is to be managed by the people in their congregational ca-

* "It should be remarked here, that a part of the transactions recorded in these passages, was extraordinary, and consequently not a rule to others. The casting all their property into a common stock, was extraordinary. This is manifest from the case of Ananias and Sapphira, Acts, 5 c. 1 v. Peter says, Whilst it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? The liberality of these disciples *exceeded*. In other respects, their conduct was according to those laws of moral duty which are universally binding upon church members, who are always under obligation to take care of the poor; to maintain the ministry to make other necessary provision for attendance upon, and dispensation of Gospel ordinances; to spread the Gospel; and to promote the temporal welfare of the brethren as they have opportunity. To accomplish these purposes, this *common fund* was formed, but with *extraordinary* liberality, so that none among them lacked." "The Deacon," page 25.

capacity ; for “ all that believed *parted them* to all men as every man had need.”

And, moreover, this must be taken as the *only* rule of duty in this matter, unless it can be shown that subsequent to this a different order was established by the same divine authority. Keeping this principle steadily in view, let us now proceed to the examination of the next portion of Scripture referred to by “ The *Deacon*” to “ confirm” his views. But which will be found to fail him as plainly as that just examined.

It is contained in Acts, 4th chap. and verses 32, 34 and 35. “ And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul. Neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them and brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the Apostles’ feet, and *distribution was made* unto every man according as he had need.”

It is evident that this is an account of only a part of these contributions, of which a general view is given in the second chapter already examined. And it is perfectly consistent with it in all its essential particulars. For although *this part* of the common fund was laid at the Apostles’ feet, yet it does not appear that any change was made in the *management* of it.

It is simply said that “ distribution was made,” but as to who were the distributors there is in this passage an entire silence. But it may be asked, Why did these people lay the prices of their lands

and houses at the Apostles' feet, if they were not to manage them? The question is a fair one, and deserves to be considered. And it is freely admitted, that these contributors were not only willing that the Apostles should take charge of them, but that they laid them at their feet, *for that very purpose*. But in the absence of all other testimony, it is certainly entirely insufficient to prove that this was the will of the Church's *Head*. If the Apostles had either *required* this money to be laid at their feet, or *taken* the management of it when *laid there*, it would have been some proof that this was a part of their official duties. But they did not do either of these; if they did, where is the evidence?

The truth is, that this act of the people is no more proof that the Apostles should manage *these temporalities*, than the disposition of the people, on another occasion, to make Christ a *temporal king*, was proof that he should be numbered among the "kings of the earth."

And the *intended* honor, it seems, was declined in both cases much in the same way, without saying any thing at all to the people about it; for in the latter it is simply said, that "When Jesus, therefore, perceived that they would come and take him by force to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone."*

And in the case now before us, the Spirit of Inspiration simply records the fact, that "*distribution was made*," or literally that it was distributed, preserving undoubtedly an *intentional silence* as to who were the distributors, as if anticipating and

* John, 6 chap. 15 verse.

guarding against the very misapprehension of "The *Deacon*" on this subject.

But it may be said here, that as this passage is entirely silent as to who made this distribution, there is no more proof that this was done by the people than by the Apostles. This is a mistake, however, for the very fact of this silence shows, that no *change* had taken place, but that it was distributed, as at the first, by the body of the people. And as this fact was previously recorded, it is not here repeated, for the inspired writers never multiply words unnecessarily.

But there is still another portion of Scripture to which we refer, which shows very clearly that the people subsequently *continued* in the management of this fund, including that part of it that had been "laid at the Apostles' feet." This is contained in Acts, 6th chap. 1st verse: "And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the *Grecians* against the *Hebrews*; because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration."

Now is it not perfectly plain, that there could have been no *cause* for murmuring against any but the *managers* of the "daily ministration?" And if this was a part of the official duty of the Apostles, the murmuring would certainly have been all against *them*, for they alone could have been *guilty* of this neglect.

Will it be admitted that the Apostles, while attending to the wants of all the rest of the assembled multitude with perfect satisfaction, and to their *own* wants, that they did totally neglect the Grecian wi-

dows, possessing as they did such strong claims upon their attention, not only from the circumstance of their being *widows*, but from the additional fact that they were *strangers*. And moreover, that the Grecians, although aware of all this, charged the official delinquency of the *Apostles* upon their fellow members, the *Hebrews*. This interpretation is contrary to reason and *common sense*. But if it be claimed that the Apostles were the managers, there is no escaping from these conclusions.

The plain meaning of the passage seems to be, that the *Hebrews*, having the control of the daily ministrations, overlooked the *Grecian widows*, and were justly murmured against for that neglect.

But the question here arises, how did the Hebrews obtain the control of this fund, if all that believed had an equal share in its management? To account for this, it has only to be remembered, that the Hebrews being the *natives* of that place, would consequently form a large majority of the people, and no doubt contributed the greater part of this fund. It is perfectly reasonable also to suppose, that when selecting persons to take the more immediate charge of so much money, they would not choose strangers of whom little could be known, but residents of the place, of known responsibility. It is evident, moreover, that the Hebrews first formed this fund, and the Grecians joining them conformed to the existing arrangements; and hence this murmuring against the *Hebrews*. We once heard it remarked, as an objection to this view, that the *Apostles* were *Hebrews*. This is admitted, but it does not benefit the objector at all, for this was certainly not their *official* designation. And if they only acted as *Hebrews*, it "confirms our view of the subject.

And now to sum up this argument, it is this : that as the spirit of inspiration teaches in the first portion of Scripture referred to, that this fund was formed and distributed by "all that believed;" and in the second, simply that "it was distributed," without stating by whom—showing that no *change* had been made; and in the third, that one part of the people murmured against the other for neglect in "the daily ministration." Therefore, this fund was managed throughout by the body of the faithful, the Apostles taking nothing at all to do with it. And therefore they did not *transfer* the management of this fund to the deacons, for no person can *transfer* to another that which he does not himself possess.

And the fact that it was so managed is sufficient to prove that it was with the *approbation* of the Apostles; for they were not careless spectators of what was going on. And being "commissioned to erect the fabric of the Church in her New Testament form,"* they could not tolerate for a moment, much less approve of, any thing contrary to the will of the Head of the Church. But they did not only *tolerate* "all that believed" in the management of this fund at the first, but also approved of it by declining to assume any control over it, even when a portion of it had been "laid at their feet" for that very purpose. Seeing, then, that the Apostles did not claim nor exercise any power over this fund, and consequently did not "transfer" it to any other officer, the question now is—what was the business over which the "*seven*" were appointed?

In reply to this we remark—First. That it could not be that that had been previously transacted by

* "The *Deacon*," page 8.

the *people*, for this had been *confirmed* to them as their prerogative by the approbation of the Apostles, and they would *certainly not* wrest it from them again, for they were not making experiments; they were acting under the influence of the Divine Spirit. And second. It could not be any thing that was previously managed by the *Apostles*. For if they were "commissioned to erect the fabric of the Church in her New Testament form," they would certainly not retard the erection of this fabric, and unnecessarily burden themselves with labor, by performing the duties of the lowest officer in the Church, to the prejudice of the more important functions of their office, until driven from it by the murmuring of the people, when so important a part of their commission was to appoint the standing officers of the Church and assign to them their appropriate duties on the very first *occasion*. And this they did. For third. The business over which these seven *were* appointed was that that had just *then* appeared, which was the *subject of complaint*. Now there was not a single word of murmuring about the *general* mismanagement of the temporalities, nor not a single hint given that any person or thing was neglected, except the Grecian *widows*. And it appears that upon the very first appearance of this indigent and unprotected class of the Lord's people, the Apostles proceeded immediately, in the exercise of their commission, to appoint officers over *this business*, for it is said that " *Then* the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them* and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the

Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over *this business*.”* And here, in order to show still more clearly the true limits of this appointment, we are constrained to refer to the original word here translated “business.” It does not become us to make a positive statement upon this, but we submit it to “The *Deacon's*” own decision, whether or not this is the same word that in the other parts of this narrative is translated “*need*,” and whether this is not its *primary meaning*. If this be the case, then the literal reading would be, “whom we may appoint over *this need*.” We would not be understood, however, as finding fault with the translation as we have it. It is no doubt correctly translated “business;” but the original is referred to, because it shows *what* that “business” was. And it harmonizes beautifully with all the other parts of the inspired record of these transactions. For while the other parts of this narrative clearly show that all the other pecuniary *need* of the Church was attended to by the body of the faithful with divine approbation, it shows with equal clearness that *this need* of the destitute and unprotected of God’s people was made by the same divine authority the business of the *officers* of his house.

That this is the true state of the case, is abundantly evident also from the writings of the Apostles. For while the officers of the Church are so frequently exhorted to be diligent and faithful in the discharge of their spiritual functions, there is not one word addressed to them about the management of the *temporalities* of the Church, except it be *such* as is contained in Galatians, 2d chap. and 10th verse:

* Acts, 6 chap. 2, 3 verses.

“ Only they would that we should remember the *poor*, the same which I also was forward to do.” But when speaking of the money for the support of the ministry, the people, and not the officers, are always addressed. And, moreover, the Apostle Paul very clearly reminds the Ephesians, Acts, 20th chap. and 34th verse, that he had taken nothing at all to do with their money. And in 2d Corinthians, chap. 11th, and 9th and 10th verses, when commending himself in opposition to *false apostles*, he boasts of the same fact respecting the money of the Corinthian Church, and declares that, “ As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia.”

Here, however, we cannot enlarge. Our limits forbid it. But we will now proceed to show that these principles, so clearly exhibited in the Scripture, are as faithfully carried out in the *subordinate standards* and *practice* of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

CHAPTER III.

“The Deacon’s” claim to the management and control of all the temporalities of the Church, is not acknowledged in the subordinate standards of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

It is the business of a “*pioneer*” in carving out *new* footsteps for his followers, to cut away every thing that may be in the way, in order that they may pass on after their leader without any hinderance. This “*The Deacon*” has done to the best of his ability, and with a zeal worthy of a better cause.

The first serious obstacle that seems to present itself, is the definition of the deacon’s office by the Westminster Divines. But the axe of the “*pioneer*” is raised, and an attempt made to dispose of this definition as follows :

“Perhaps some may suppose a change to have been intended in the adoption of the form of church government drawn up at Westminster, which says that the deacon is to take special care of the poor. In regard to this, let it be remarked, first the language employed is not at all inconsistent with the doctrines of the Book of Discipline. It is merely said that the deacon has a *special* business, by no means affirming that it is his *only* business.”*

What ! Did that venerable assembly, distinguished as it was for learning, talents and integrity, take up this office to define it, and merely say that the deacon has “a special business,” and not say a word about his common or ordinary business. And then as the result of their investigations, publish *this* to the world as a *definition* of the deacon’s office ? If this be the

* “*The Deacon*,” page 33.

true explanation of this part of our standards, we should like to be informed of what *possible use* it can be to the Church. According to this interpretation, this definition of the deacon's office, must be taken as a mere starting point, to which additions may be made from time to time, according to the taste or interest of every individual who may have influence or *tact* enough to procure the sanction of his views by a Church court. And indeed, if this be admitted, the deacons would be at no loss for business. We recollect a proposition being made on the floor of synod, from a no less respectable source than the report of a presbytery, on the form of church government then before the Church in overture, that "The deacons should *adjudicate* all *civil difficulties* among the members of the Church." And at the very same meeting of synod, a disorderly and contemptuous person who had to be ejected from the court, complained very bitterly that some of the members of synod had "put their hands on him," for he thought that "it was the *business* of the *deacons* to put him out."

Let it be observed also, that in the "Second Book of Discipline," to which some individuals have conceived an extraordinary attachment of late, it is mentioned, among other benefits that would flow from the deacons managing the temporalities, that "it shall be a great ease and commodity to the whole common people, in building of *bridges* and other like public works."* Now supposing that some ultra individual on this question (and it would not be hard to find such) would take it into his head that all the above

* Chap. 13.

opinions are correct, and moreover, if he should decide that the clause "other like public works," when applied to the present time, would mean *rail-roads*, &c. And if we should attempt to convince him of his error, by pointing to our form of Church government, he might reply to every appeal of this kind in the words of "The *Deacon*." "It is merely said that the deacon has a special business, by no means affirming that is his only business."

But there is a slight mistake in "The *Deacon's*" statement, viz: that it is contrary to matter of fact.

The Westminster divines do *not* say that the deacon has "a special business." They say that he is "to take *special care* in distributing to the necessities of the poor.*" And again, "to take *special care* for the relief of the poor."† And it is perfectly plain that the word *special* does not apply to the business of the deacon at all, but to the *care* with which he is to attend to that business.

And the reason for using this word is equally plain. It had been previously assigned to the pastor and elders to take *care* of the poor. And hence it is here said that the deacons are to take *special care* in distributing to their necessities, they being ordained for that very purpose.

And as this is *all* the business assigned to the deacons by the Westminster divines, they do by all means teach that "this is his *only* business." The assembly may have been wrong, and "The *Deacon*" may be right; however unlikely this may be, it is at least possible.

But it must certainly be admitted that that venerable body did the best *they* could to discover the

* Confession of Faith, page 572.

† Page 574.

proper extent of the deacon's *power*, and that this definition, "brought to us as the result of their long and learned debate," is at least an honest and *full* exhibition of *their* views.

But Covenantors are bound by this document as "it was received by the Church of Scotland." Now in the act of the General Assembly of that church approving of this form of government, there is ample evidence that the confining of the deacon's power to the "care of the poor" received their hearty concurrence, for they say:

"The Assembly having thrice read, and deliberately examined the propositions (hereunto annexed,) concerning the *officers*, assemblies, and government of the Kirk, and concerning the ordination of ministers, brought unto us as the result of the long and learned debates of the assembly of divines sitting at Westminster, and of the treaty of uniformity with the commissioners of this Kirk there residing: after mature deliberation, and after timeous calling upon and warning of all who have any exceptions against the same, to make them known, that they might receive satisfaction, doth agree to and approve the propositions aforementioned, &c.

"Provided always, that this act be no ways prejudicial to the farther discussion and examination of that article, which holds forth that the Doctor, or teacher, hath power of the administration of the sacraments, as well as the pastor: as also of the distinct rights and interests of the presbyteries and people* in the calling of ministers: but that it shall be free to debate and discuss these points as God shall be pleased to give farther light."†

From these extracts it appears that this form of government was very carefully scrutinized by the Church of Scotland, previous to its adoption by that body. Yet it does not appear that any *omission* was discovered in the definition of the deacon's office.

And the provision which they are careful to make

* To speak of the "rights of the people" is *now* viewed by some as a semi-infidel expression. It was not so viewed by the Church of Scotland.

† See the act of the General Assembly approving this form of government. Confession of Faith, p. 561.

for the farther discussion of the doctor's power, and also of the distinct rights of the presbyteries and people in the calling of ministers, shows that they were "jealous to a nicety" about the power of the *officers* and the *rights* of the people.

But they made no provision for any farther discussion of the deacon's power, and hence the conclusion is irresistible that the Church of Scotland viewed this office as *fully* discussed, *defined* and settled by the Westminster divines. And, therefore, Covenanters being bound by this document as so received, have never claimed any more power for the deacon than that which is therein assigned him.

"The *Deacon*," in reference to this, asks, Will it be said that the Scottish Church meant to throw aside her attainments and reconstruct her order? We answer, no. But it *is* said, without fear of successful contradiction, that in *this* act of the Westminster assembly, thus approved by the Church of Scotland, a very valuable *attainment was made*. For they, seeing that the officers of the Church had been formerly lording it over the people in this matter, are careful to confine every officer within the proper limits of his office, and by that means to secure to the people the enjoyment of all the rights and privileges conferred upon them by the Church's glorious King and Head.

The next portion of the subordinate standards which "The *Deacon*" attempts to explain to suit his new system, is contained in the same form of government drawn up by the Westminster divines, approved by the Church of Scotland, and practised upon by the Covenanters. It is this: When speaking of the officers of a particular congregation, it is

said that, "These officers are to meet together at convenient and set times, for the well ordering of the affairs of that congregation, each according to his office."* As an explanation of this, he asserts that :

" They are to attend to *the affairs of that congregation—the whole affairs, temporal and spiritual*—for in this manner unlimited expressions such as this are to be explained, unless necessarily limited, and here no such necessity exists. Besides, what is commonly understood by the affairs of a congregation ? Certainly its whole interests. The pecuniary affairs, as well as the affairs of the poor and the spiritual affairs. None need to be told that the first of these, the pecuniary, are not only *affairs*, but often very important ones. They are to transact these affairs *each according to his office*."

Now we do not pretend to know what would constitute the "necessary limits" of an "unlimited expression," but it is perfectly clear that "The *Deacon*" has here given to this *limited* expression a very *unlimited* explanation. We had thought that the claims previously put forth were sufficiently grasping to suit the most ambitious aspirant after power. But here every thing is claimed for the officers, and nothing at all left to be transacted by the people, except it be something that does not belong to the *interests* of the congregation—something that is not an *affair*—something that is neither temporal nor spiritual, nor the care of the poor. But with all due deference to "The *Deacon*," we humbly claim for the people the right to transact *one item* at least, which we think will not be deemed unworthy of being reckoned among the *interests* of a congregation which is not only an "*affair*," but a very important one ; and in reckoning the *temporal and spiritual "affairs"* and the "affairs" of the poor, this "*affair*"

* Confession of Faith, page 574.

might probably be found somewhere among them; we mean the calling of a minister. And we ask "The *Deacon*," whether the officers of a congregation or the people are to transact *this affair*? if he claims this for the officers, it is high time the Church should know it, and if he admits that this *affair* is to be transacted by the *people*, then he must admit that the above quotation from the standards is not "an unlimited expression," but that it is *limited* by the last clause, "*each according to his office*," and then the meaning is perfectly plain, that the officers are to attend to all the *affairs* that are *according* to their offices respectively: but all the affairs that do not *accord* with their offices as defined above, by the same venerable assembly, are to be transacted by the body of the faithful in a congregational capacity.

Now taking it for granted that he will concede to the people the right to call their pastor without any dictation from the officers of the congregation, we have great pleasure in introducing an argument from his own publication, which shows conclusively that having this power, it necessarily belongs to them to manage the funds necessary for their support. In page 67 he expresses himself thus:

"The least reflection will satisfy us that to remove entirely the management of the fiscal concerns of any society out of the hands of those who have the direction of its other affairs, would be unwise and unsafe. Such an arrangement any where would probably terminate by clashing between these independent powers in the same body; for example, the legislature in a state so constituted might legislate, but in every instance where an appropriation was requisite for carrying laws into effect, the will of the legislature might be thwarted by the fiscal officers and rendered ineffectual."

Now we endorse every word of this argument with our whole heart; it is unanswerable; but we are very sorry that he did not try its application to the

case in hand, instead of taking a state for an example, for in that case he would certainly have discovered the inconsistency of his whole system. We will try it, however, and it may yet be of use to somebody. Let us then observe that a congregation so constituted might make out calls for ministers, but in every instance an appropriation being requisite for carrying these calls into effect, the will of the congregation "might be thwarted by the fiscal officers and rendered ineffectual," and thus "terminate by clashing between these independent powers in the same body." The *Deacon* adds that, "often, unquestionably, would this occur, consequently we find no society so constituted." Again, he says, page 68: "Now it may be asked, and it would be hard to find an answer that would satisfy a man of sense, why a principle of so universal application should not apply to the concerns of the Church in a single congregation?" To this we reply that there is *no reason* why it should not apply in all cases, it is the very principle that Covenantors have always applied. The people have had the making out of calls for their pastors, and hence they have had the management of the fiscal concerns, and thus have been enabled to make appropriations for their support, and carry out their will in this matter without clashing with fiscal officers. And as "The *Deacon*" is now laboring with all his might to break up this long established order, we therefore return the above question to its sage propounder, and look to him for an "answer that would satisfy a man of sense," why this principle should not continue to be applied as it has always been in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Again, he asks, "If the eldership of a congregation have no voice in secular affairs at home, how do they acquire it in those larger bounds which the presbyterial and synodical limits embrace? If it be right that a synod should take the oversight in fiscal matters of what is synodical, and a presbytery of what is presbyterial, why should not a session of what is congregational?"

Now the answer to all this is furnished by "The Deacon" himself, in the principle exhibited above. The eldership *as such*, have no voice in secular affairs in a congregation, because they do not *there* manage the business that require the appropriation of money: but in presbyteries and synods, they *do* manage the business that require appropriations of money to carry such business into effect; and hence they manage the fiscal concerns of these courts: And for the same reason they have a right to the control of whatever is necessary to carry out *sessional* business, such as the necessary expenses of the communion, &c. And thus the synod *should* take the oversight in fiscal matters of what is *synodical*. The presbytery of what is *presbyterial*, a session of what is *sessional*, and a congregation of what is *congregational*, and all for the same reason, because in *all* these several capacities the business is managed requiring appropriations of money, and therefore, it would be both "unwise and unsafe" to remove out of their hands in any of these departments of the Church's organization, the *management of their own appropriate fiscal concerns*, "The Deacon" himself being *judge*. Will he then persevere in his endeavors to wrest from the people the management of their temporalities, and allow them

to *continue to transact* the business of calling ministers, &c., which requires such large "appropriations" of money to carry them into effect? No; he cannot do this, for "such arrangement any where would terminate by clashing, and would be *unwise* and *unsafe*."

We humbly conceive that "The *Deacon*" will here find himself in a dilemma, from the horns of which, he will not easily escape; he must either *admit* on the one hand, that the people have the right both to call their pastors and manage the funds necessary to "appropriate" for their support; or claim on the other, that the officers of the congregation being the managers of the fiscal concerns, must also have the power of calling the ministers: for he has shown most conclusively that *both of these* must be lodged in the *same hands*.

We will now conclude by answering a question which we have heard frequently proposed, and which is well calculated to intimidate, but not to convince. It is this, waiving all discussion: Are you not willing to trust this to Christ's officers? We answer, *no*, and we repeat it, *no*. If the Head of the Church has not committed this to his officers, but left it to the people as their prerogative, we *dare not* commit it to them as their official business, for in that act there would be both a *slighting* of his *goodness* and an *insulting of his wisdom*. We would not then slight his goodness by casting upon his officers that which he has made the *duty* and *privilege* of the body of the faithful. Nor would we be wiser than our Maker by committing to his officers that which he did not see proper to commit to them.

But we would invite all the private members of

the Church to join with us in endeavoring to *appreciate* more highly the privileges conferred upon us by her gracious Head; and also in endeavoring to discharge more faithfully all the duties incumbent upon us, honoring at the same time the officers of Christ "very highly for their works' sake," and so sustaining them in temporal things, that in all their official intercourse with the people, they may be kept free from embarrassment, and be able always to say with the great Apostle of the Gentiles, "*We seek not yours but you.*" And that all the Lord's people may find that in the faithful discharge of all their duties in "their several places and relations," there is a source of pure happiness and refined enjoyment; and by the influence of the Holy Spirit be made instrumental in the mutual interchange of kind offices in temporal and spiritual things, in promoting the *peace, comfort* and *prosperity* of the house of God, and the *glory* of his exalted name, is the earnest prayer of the writer.

JOHN NIGHTINGALE.

APPENDIX.

Those who claim official power over all the temporalities of the Church, strenuously contend that the Reformed Presbyterian Synod, at its last meeting, settled this question according to *their* views, because it was declared by that court, "that our covenanted uniformity does not recognize as of divine right the congregational trustee, but the scriptural deacon," the functions of whose office are declared in "the form of Church Government," and "Reformation principles." Now, the above declaration states an admitted fact. But will any person maintain that every thing that is not recognized in our covenanted uniformity must be rejected by the Church?

If this is the position the Church must be placed in, then the principle

and practice of electing ministers and other officers by the general suffrage of all the members of a congregation, male and female, must be rejected, for it is certainly the fact that this principle is not there recognized. And the synod if forced to come to a vote on that question, would undoubtedly so decide it. But would that decision be sufficient to show that any member of the Church, male or *female*, in regular standing, should be deprived of their right to vote for their pastor and spiritual rulers? Certainly not. And neither does the above declaration of synod prove that congregations may not have trustees. The truth is, that neither the principle of general suffrage of all the members of a congregation, male and female, in the election of their pastor and other officers, nor that of having trustees, is recognized in "our covenanted uniformity." But it is equally true that neither is condemned. And the *scriptural* deacon as there exhibited, is recognized by the Reformed Presbyterian Church generally.

It is also contended that the synod means to teach that consistories have the *whole power and control of all* the temporal concerns of the congregation, when that court declares:—

"That said covenanted uniformity does not recognize as of divine right a consistory of ministers, elders and deacons, having authority to enact, govern and control the Church, either in her spiritual or temporal concerns—or as having any authority or power whatever, except for consultation or advice for the well ordering of the temporal affairs of the congregation." Now the above explanation of this declaration is certainly a most extraordinary one; and those who venture it must calculate very largely upon the stupidity of the people. It seems impossible to understand the synod as here teaching that consistories have *all* the power over the temporalities of the Church, unless this declaration is to be interpreted like a dream, by "contraries."

But the fact is, that the very reverse is taught; for if consistories have "no *authority or power whatever*, except for *consultation or advice*," they have just no *official* power at all.* The right to give a good advice belongs to every individual of the human family, and the only *power* necessary for this purpose, is the mental power to frame an advice, and the physical power to express it. But who are the ministers, elders and deacons in consistory to advise about these temporalities? It cannot be the *deacons*, for they are among the *advisers*. It must be the *congregation* then. And it is certainly their duty to receive with all due deference the *advice* of the officers of Christ in this matter, especially if it be presented as the result of a "consultation."

But, after all, if it be only an advice, they have the right as a congregation to decide whether it shall be adopted.

* It is said in the same way, that "synods and councils are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary, or by way of *advice*."—*Confession of Faith*, chap. xxxi. sec. 5.

